

# Razia comes to town – drop by drop

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**F**ormer Duxbury Businesswoman Razia Jan will return from Afghanistan to the Boston area for three days in October. As she has before, she will update the Duxbury public at the Senior Center on Tuesday, Oct. 18 from 6 to 8 p.m. An active member of the Duxbury Rotary, Razia owned and operated a tailor and dry cleaning shop near Hall's Corner.



## WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

When Sept. 11 slammed into us, and soon after slammed into the already war-torn Afghanistan, Razia mobilized relief efforts to help rescue workers in New York, American soldiers in Af-

ghanistan, and the poorest of the poor – the children of her native Afghanistan. In conjunction with U.S. Military humanitarian efforts, Razia put thousands of shoes on Afghan children with Operation Shoe-fly. The program piggy-backed children's shoes onto leftover space on the sky-train of military transports headed for the country.

At the same time, she stitched scarves for the soldiers. Hers were gray,

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the perfect color to match the dust of the Hindu Kush, the forbidding foothold of the Himalayas that dominates Afghanistan and sends its powdery stone into the basin of Kabul and the desert beyond. A gentle gray, unlike the fierce black scarves I saw on Scandinavian troopers lurching through the streets in 2008. They looked like Darth Vader. Razia's scarves looked Afghan, not alien. It's a subtlety that Razia never mentioned, but I could see it instantly. Call it local knowledge, or the profound cultural awareness that only a native-born Afghan could have. Razia has it.

Razia's Ray of Hope Foundation (<http://raziasrayofhope.org>) tells the story of her deepest dream, the 2008 opening of the Zabuli Education Center, a community-based privately funded tuition-free school for girls in Deh Sabz, a bitterly poor area on the outskirts of Kabul. The late David Cutler, his son Josh and the Clipper sent me to cover the school's opening in March of 2008, the adventure of a lifetime. I ache to return. Under Razia's oversight the school continues to thrive.

You can review the curriculum on the Web site. Remember, it's Afghanistan, an Islamic Republic, so religion is on the agenda along with science, practical learning, and the languages of Dari, Pashto, and English. Then too, remember that there may be no greater power for change in Afghanistan than a woman who knows what the Qur'an (spelled Car'an on the Web site) actually says, because she can read it for herself and her children. Remember too that the Zabuli School has reached out successfully to the long-standing boy's Madrasa, a religious school, across the street. Local cultural knowledge again, and essential to the Zabuli School's success and security.

Razia also continues her "day job" as Program Director for Arzu Rugs, a humanitarian project that pays Afghan women directly for their rug weaving, along with a substantial bonus if the family sends all of its children and one adult woman to school, which the program also supports financially. I'm hoping she'll bring some of the rugs again – they're stunning – along with crafts and jewelry to fit any budget. The proceeds, of course, go to the people who made the items.

Razia's dreams don't stop there. The Zabuli Center has secured adjacent land to develop a health clinic to "provide vital prenatal care to pregnant women, support for home-based labor and delivery, and neonatal care for infants." At 144 infant deaths per 1,000 live births, Afghanistan's infant mortality rate is the highest in the world (from the 2011 revision of the United Nations World Population Prospects report, found on Wikipedia).

"Qatra, qatra, darya mesha." It's an Afghan saying Razia taught us years ago. It means, "Drop by drop, you make a mighty river."